

The Indigenous Business Review



ISSUE 6 | JUNE 2025

Keeping the fires burning

Darren Hammond
leads a cultural shift
in disaster resilience

FIRST ANNIVERSARY EDITION

New directory
launches to
mark milestone

EXCLUSIVE

Leaders share
their visions for
re-elected Labor
government

FROM SALTWATER TO CAB SAV

The rise of
Mitu Wines

BUILDING A BETTER **FUTURE**

together at Onslow Iron

ABOUT US

Are you ready to make a difference? Jundalya, a 100% Thalanyji owned recruitment company, is actively seeking Indigenous talent across Western Australia. Led by the dedicated Karen Hayes and her expert team, Jundalya specialises in connecting Indigenous people with exciting opportunities in the MinRes Onslow Iron project and other MinRes roles Australia wide.

Head to the website to find out more.
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Cover image: Darren Hammond. Dressed by: M.J. Bale. Photography: Lawrence Furzey. On Gadigal Land.

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The Indigenous Business Review

A year ago, we launched the first print edition of The Indigenous Business Review, a high-quality, glossy, nationally distributed publication dedicated solely to profiling the leaders, businesses and stories that drive Indigenous enterprise across this country.

It took a lot of work to get to launch, and a lot of work since. But every day I'm reminded why we do this: in every corner of Australia, Indigenous men and women are working hard to improve their lives, their families' futures and their communities. And they're not just surviving — they're flourishing.

Starting a national print magazine isn't easy. I want to thank, first and foremost, the incredible backers of our foundation partners, our advertisers, and our print partners — each of whom took a punt on us because they believed these are the stories Australians should read. I'm also incredibly grateful to my fellow co-founders of The IBR, our contributors and the entire team at National Indigenous Times, who have helped deliver on this vision.

From day one, our goal was to change the story. Indigenous business isn't a side note — it's the main event. We've profiled builders, creatives, founders, educators and financiers. Every edition is grounded in the same belief: Indigenous business is shaping Australia's future, and rightly so.

This month, The IBR is proud to announce the launch of our **Indigenous Business Directory**, a digital resource that permanently houses the many businesses featured in The IBR and the NIT. It's a practical tool for procurement teams, corporates and consumers who want to buy Black.

In this edition, you'll find powerful yarns — from the **BHP x Telethon** partnership, to our exclusive roundup of **business leaders' visions for a re-elected Labor government**. We also profile rising leaders like **Grant Maher**; feature stories like **AFW x CBA**, and **Kurtarra & Fortescue JV**; plus we spotlight a new Indigenous wine label and the inspiring journey of **Bradley Gimbert** in Indigenous wealth.

Thank you for your continued support of The IBR and most importantly, of the Indigenous businesses across our country.

Zak Kirkup
Managing Editor





New directory to be a national go-to guide

Our new digital database will connect creators, buyers and sellers, Zak Kirkup writes

We've spent a year telling the stories of Indigenous business — now we're building the tool that ensures they're seen, heard and engaged with long after our magazine is printed.

That's why we're proud to launch the next evolution of The Indigenous Business Review: the Indigenous Business Directory — a dedicated, practical tool to help buyers, procurement officers and the public find and connect with verified Indigenous-owned businesses across Australia.

In this first stage, we're asking Indigenous businesses, whether you've been profiled by The IBR or the National Indigenous Times, or are new to our platform, to submit your details. We're building the foundations of something big and we want to make sure your business is

represented from the start. The directory will be a free digital resource with searchable listings that include core information such as business name, industry, ownership structure, location and contact details. Over time, we'll be adding features to make it even more powerful — sector filters, region-based browsing and integration with supplier diversity frameworks.

This is about more than visibility. It's about access. We want to make it easier for those looking to buy from, work with, or invest in Indigenous-owned businesses to find them.

Whether you're a sole trader, a growing SME, or a major employer in your region, we want you in the directory.

To get started, scan the QR code or visit <https://theibr.short.gy/directory> and fill out the quick form. It takes just a few minutes and it will ensure your business is included as we roll out the platform across the next quarter. This is just the beginning. With your help, we'll be building a resource that reflects the scale, diversity and strength of Indigenous business today and for the years to come. •



SCAN ME

Lead from the front

Leaders have challenged Labor to use its mandate to deliver reform that improves lives

From the Senate to the boardroom, some of the country's most influential Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders have shared their expectations exclusively with The Indigenous Business Review. Across the next six pages, we speak to Supply Nation chief executive Kate Russell, Senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price and respected business figures Narelle Anderson, Naomi Anstess, Wayne Bergmann, Tara Croker and Deon Divow.

Each sets out a clear and compelling vision for what Labor must deliver in its second term, calling for bold reform, stronger accountability and genuine partnership with the First Nations business sector. Amid growing concern about performative procurement, limited capital access and inconsistent engagement, these leaders outline what's needed now to turn policy promises into lasting outcomes for Indigenous economic empowerment.

Three steps to grow botanicals

An industry sprouting quickly still needs strategic backing

With the election now behind us, we have a gentle pause to consider what the Albanese government might prioritise in its second term to help Indigenous businesses thrive. From my perspective at Yaala Sparkling, a new-generation beverage company that weaves the wisdom of native plants with innovation to craft uniquely Australian products, thoughtful, targeted support for Australia's native plant sector would make a meaningful difference.

Australia's native plant movement is already a vibrant \$80m appetiser, and analysts predict double-digit growth well into the next decade. Antioxidant-packed Kakadu plums, antibacterial lemon myrtle leaves and a whole palette of native botanicals are reshaping cosmetics, food, cleaning products and pharmaceuticals. This is bigger than a trend, but here's the plot twist: while global companies rush to trademark our botanicals, many Indigenous brands are left off the shelf space at home. We can flip that script by backing three big moves.

Proof of provenance

Traditional Owners have nurtured and passed down knowledge of native plants for generations. An Indigenous-led provenance registry – think of it as a “blue tick” for bush foods – could license fair use and ensure royalties flow directly back to communities. This type of collective mark has driven hundreds of millions in export value overseas and it could do the same here, while protecting cultural heritage. Imagine the same global recognition and protections afforded to Champagne being applied to Kakadu plums and Tasmanian mountain pepper.

Open the doors that matter

Australia's native ingredients have stepped into the spotlight, and they're here to stay. Mixologists are shaking up green ant spritzes; TikTok chefs are serving neon pink Davidson plum cheesecakes to millions of viewers; and bush tucker spice blends are landing in meal kits across the country.

But all the buzz means little if homegrown brands don't see real world benefit.

Access must be part of the promise. Any stadium, airport, hotel or venue should reserve a percentage of procurement for locally owned Indigenous brands. This carve-out transforms public investment into a springboard for Australian producers, not a barrier enforced by multinationals wielding exclusivity clauses that shut out local competition. Consumers get healthier, more ethical choices. Venues get a meaningful story to tell. Everyone wins.

Scale the trade game

The native plant industry is gaining serious international traction, so now it's time for policy to catch up.

Native ingredients hit every target of modern trade priorities: they're rooted in Indigenous knowledge, they support regional jobs, they promote sustainable agriculture and they offer climate-smart solutions. Yet despite this potential, the sector continues without the policy support it deserves.

While Canberra rolls out the red carpet for wine and beef, native foods are still waiting at the door.

It's time to give this industry the same strategic backing: fund trade delegations, help businesses scale and invest in the infrastructure that regional communities need to participate in commercial markets on their own terms.

Yaala Sparkling was born from a desire to share authentic Indigenous flavours with the world, and today, our drinks are stocked across the country. Expanding that path for other Indigenous producers means more than growing a market. It protects cultural knowledge, strengthens intellectual property rights and exports a uniquely Australian story of Country, sustainability and flavour. The return isn't just commercial. It generates regional jobs and advances equity and it builds a food identity that tastes unmistakably like home. •

Flip that script: Yaala Sparkling founder Tara Croker

'Less talk, more action'

When it comes to Indigenous economic empowerment, we need less talk and more action.

"Everyone has the policies and the principles. But it's all about the implementation. It's no different to the criminal system," says Wayne Bergmann, a prominent Indigenous business leader with more than 30 years of experience.

The bottom line according to Bergmann: governments must back proven winners, Indigenous entrepreneurs who "get shit done".

Indigenous businesses have consistently punched above their weight and, while the economic treadmill is turning, bureaucracy, inconsistent policy application and green-only strategies threaten to slow momentum.

"Dealing with government advisers who've never been in the ring ... they don't know what it takes to build a business from the ground up," Bergmann says.

A good place to start? Setting minimum standards in Indigenous engagement, employment and agreement-making.

Red tape, green tape and policy flip-flops are stifling success-seekers, writes David Prestipino

"If you're negotiating Native Title agreements, there's a chasm between deals in Australia," Bergmann says.

Without proper benchmarking, one group may land a good deal, while another might get scraps from the same project and taxpayers foot the bill for the fallout.

"The government needs to grab the bull by the horns and support sectors where Indigenous businesses already thrive, like the pastoral industry," Bergmann says, noting the mounting pressure to transition vast pastoral lands into Indigenous Protected Areas and carbon projects.

While laudable, this approach must be balanced. "Don't put all your chips in the green economy," Bergmann says.

"If we turned off the pastoral enterprises, who's going to pay the rates? The Australian public, through taxes."

The risk of an unbalanced transition is clear: "Without building more infrastructure to generate income and support workers, there's no scale," Bergmann says.

He's optimistic about partnerships, when they're done right.

"The biggest impact businesses can have is to be a partner, purchase our products, services that are market-competitive and high-quality. That allows us to manage the company, the land and the legacy. That's best practice," he says.

To create a sustainable Indigenous economy, Australia needs diverse markets, not just in tourism or carbon credits, but across mining, pastoralism and beyond.

"It's time to stop spinning wheels and start backing winners. Because if we don't get Indigenous people on the economic treadmill, we'll stay stuck on welfare, and we all pay for that." ●

“

The government needs to grab the bull by the horns and support sectors where Indigenous businesses already thrive, like the pastoral industry

Workers of Indigenous-owned cattle company KAPCO (Kimberley Agriculture and Pastoral Company) in the yards

Trading is in our nature

A remote location should not be a barrier to success

Entrepreneur Dion Devow says Indigenous go-getters should aim high to expand their businesses nationally and globally

As an Aboriginal entrepreneur and founder of DDesigns and Yerra, I've seen how Indigenous business is a powerful force for change, not just for individuals, but for entire communities. Our businesses don't just create jobs; they strengthen identity, preserve culture and create hope. What most people don't understand is that we have always been entrepreneurs, trading with one another and with other countries and peoples for thousands of years, such as Macassans. Business is not new to us.

From the re-elected Albanese government, I'd like to see bold, long-term investment in Indigenous economic development, grounded in genuine partnerships and cultural respect. That starts with increasing Indigenous procurement targets, supporting our First Nations Chambers of Commerce and more importantly, supporting smaller businesses to access and thrive within those frameworks. Many of us still face barriers to tendering, compliance and growth. We need hands-on, culturally appropriate support to navigate the systems.

Through DDesigns and Yerra, I've mentored young Indigenous designers and entrepreneurs who have incredible ideas but limited access to capital, networks or mentorship. The government could be investing in Indigenous-led business hubs and pre-accelerator and accelerators, especially in regional and remote areas, to nurture this talent from the ground up. Remote

location should not be a barrier for our people in 2025. With technological advances, we have access to information, resources and connection to people not only domestically, but internationally.

I'd also like to see a stronger focus on positioning Indigenous businesses in the global marketplace. We are rich in culture, innovation and storytelling. The world is watching and is interested in our culture and what we have to offer as the world's oldest continuing culture. With support for export readiness, international trade missions and partnerships with First Nations businesses overseas, we can take our products, services and cultural knowledge to the world on our own terms.

Digital equity is also crucial. If we want our people to lead in industries of the future, such as AI and clean energy, we must close the information technology gap and create real pathways from school to entrepreneurship and utilise our skills.

When we look at how many of our people can speak more than four or five languages in places such as Maningrida in the NT, why can't we harness this human asset and use the fact that we are multilingual to introduce IT to our youths, specifically coding, which is also a language. Let's write a program around that and the skill set that enables that.

This is the type of innovation we need to understand what our people possess in terms of value that extends

outside of our excellence in the arts and sports. And who can come up with this type of innovation? Entrepreneurs. Let's harness all our assets and change the narratives that exist such as "we have poor language and literacy skills". When some Aboriginal people can speak eight different dialects before English, that does not equate to poor language skills.

Most importantly, policy must be designed with us, not for us. We need more Indigenous people in rooms where decisions are made, shaping the policies and programs that affect our economic futures. Creativity, innovation, problem-solving, remote business innovation, intergenerational knowledge, sustainability thinking, cultural diplomacy, circular economic thinking and resilience are all traits of the black entrepreneur.

These skills are invaluable, and we have had 60,000 years worth of experience in cultivating them. If the government can understand this, it can utilise them.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business is about more than profit — it's about pride, purpose and power. With the right support, we can lead not just locally, but globally. ●

Dion Devow is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander entrepreneur, a proud Manbarra Traditional Owner (Palm Island Group) and Erub (Darnley Island) Torres Strait Islander, ACT Australian of the Year and a multiple ACT NAIDOC Award recipient.

'Act boldly' to secure future

Labor has been urged to get serious on certification, Brendan Foster reports

First Nations business chambers around Australia are the heart and soul of empowering Indigenous companies. The chambers are a powerful voice for the needs of Indigenous businesses by building their skills and capability and advocating and generating wealth for Aboriginal-owned companies.

After the re-election of the Albanese government, the National Indigenous Times asked two prominent chambers what more Labor could do to boost and support the First Nations economy.

Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network big boss Naomi Anstess said it was time to back "blak businesses" to build Australia's future.

"With a clear mandate from the Australian people, the Albanese government must act boldly," Anstess says. "This starts by formally recognising jurisdictional Blak Business Chambers and National Indigenous Business Chambers Alliance as the national certifiers of genuine Aboriginal businesses, and ensuring they have a permanent seat at the table for all policy and decision-making on Aboriginal economic development. No more black-cladding. No more tokenism. No more sidelining Aboriginal voices in our own economy."

Indigenous businesses contribute more than \$16bn to the Australian economy and pay around \$4.2bn in wages, yet many First Nation companies are still struggling to get backing from the finance sector, even though financial experts say First Nations businesses will grow at twice the rate of the rest of the economy.

Anstess says now is the time for the Commonwealth government to use its mandate to invest in long-term nation-building projects led by Aboriginal businesses, not just government services.

"We need to move beyond short-term projects to long-term nation-building investments in Blak industries, land and sea economies and intergenerational wealth," she says. "Mandate recognition of jurisdictional chambers and NIBCA as the national certifiers of genuine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses and legislate First Nations Economic Empowerment Agreements with clear targets, resourcing and accountability."

"Also shift from program funding to structural reform and generational wealth-building."

One of the major drivers for the First Nation economy has been the introduction of the Commonwealth government's Indigenous Procurement Policy.

Since the IPP was launched almost 10 years ago,



'No more tokenism':
Naomi Anstess



Ambitious targets:
Narelle Anderson

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-owned companies have secured \$10bn in Commonwealth contracts.

The Albanese government recently overhauled the policy so businesses need to be 51 per cent or more First Nations owned and controlled to access Commonwealth procurement contracts. The government also lifted the Indigenous procurement targets from 2.5 per cent of the value of contracts to 3 per cent from July 1, 2025. The targets will then rise annually until they reach 4 per cent by 2030.

Anstess, a proud Kamilaroi/Gamilaraay and Torres Strait Islander (Erub/Darnley Island) woman, says while the reforms are welcome, the government can be bolder and lift the targets to 5 per cent with 10 per cent stretch targets in key industries.

"We must now move from reform to transformation to legislate recognition of jurisdictional chambers and NIBCA as certifiers to stop black-cladding; set stronger, enforceable targets with penalties for noncompliance and introduce exclusive Aboriginal procurement categories," Anstess says.

NSW Indigenous Chamber of Commerce deputy-chair Narelle Anderson says while the chamber also welcomes the tweaks to the IPP, she says some agencies hit targets and then stop engaging further.

"Targets should be ambitious and tied to outcomes like Indigenous employment, local economic impact and long-term contracts, not just spend percentages," she tells the National Indigenous Times.

"Three per cent is a minimum, not a ceiling."

The Commonwealth government says it is also

planning to work with regulators to stamp out so-called black-cladding, where non-Indigenous businesses falsely claim to be Aboriginal-owned to gain access to government contracts.

Anderson says the reforms don't go far enough.

"The reforms are a first step, but without strict enforcement of 51 per cent majority Indigenous ownership and control, black-cladding will persist," she says. "Regulators must also ensure cultural governance standards, not just ownership metrics."

Anderson says Labor should commit to structural transformation led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

"This includes empowering Aboriginal-controlled organisations to design, deliver and lead economic programs," she says.

Indigenous leaders and WA senator and Yamatji-Noongar woman Dorinda Cox have called for stronger leadership on closing the gap after Labor's win.

"The path forward must include transitioning from government-led to community-led models, as shown by Community Resources' RAP and strategic move to Aboriginal leadership," Anderson says. "By embedding economic policy within cultural frameworks, ensuring any economic gains reinforce sovereignty – not assimilation."

Anstess says Labor should make Aboriginal economic empowerment central to closing the gap: "Legislate enforceable targets for procurement, employment and industry development and invest in intergenerational Blak wealth and business leadership." •

Call for reset on policy priorities

The Indigenous Procurement Policy is overdue for a review that reflects growth and maturity, **Brendan Foster** reports

Prior to the election, the Commonwealth flagged a shift towards economic-based policies over Indigenous rights, recognition and truth-telling. While policies assisting Indigenous businesses are welcome, the Labor government must do more to invite First Nations leaders to the bargaining table.

The Coalition of Peaks, representing more than 80 Aboriginal community-controlled peak organisations, reported in March that First Nations communities weren't being properly consulted on government economic policies.

The National Indigenous Times asked Supply Nation, the nation's leader in supplier diversity, about its expectations of Labor.

Supply Nation chief executive Kate Russell says continued and improved policy settings to assist business growth and economic empowerment are essential.

"The growth of the Indigenous business sector is having a positive impact on the economy and on the prosperity of all Australians," Russell says. "Support for organisations and institutions dedicated to growing Indigenous-owned businesses must remain a high priority."

According to the University of Melbourne's Indigenous Business Snapshot, First Nations businesses contribute \$16bn to the economy; they employ 116,795 people; and they pay \$4.2bn in wages. Indigenous businesses also employ Indigenous Australians at higher rates than non-Indigenous ones.

A key driver has been the federal government's Indigenous Procurement Policy, which since July 2015 has generated \$9bn in government spending, awarding more than 47,500 contracts to more than 3000 Indigenous businesses.

Earlier this year, the Commonwealth said the IPP

would be lifted to require 51 per cent Indigenous ownership and it raised its contract target from 2.5 per cent to 4 per cent by 2030. "It has been 10 years since the IPP was implemented," Russell says.

"It's timely to review procurement targets and business definitions. The sector has grown and matured." She also wants more than procurement, including true partnerships, mentoring, training and support services.

One major challenge is black-cladding, which happens when non-Indigenous companies falsely claim to have Indigenous status to win contracts. "Black-

cladding is fraud and should be prosecuted," Russell says. "Supply Nation has a rigorous verification process."

There are also calls for state and territory governments to meet Indigenous procurement and employment targets on federally funded projects. ●

Black-cladding is fraud and should be prosecuted



Kate Russell wants more support for growing businesses

Private enterprise the best route to independence

Reliance on government leg-ups helps no one and stifles ambition, writes **Liberal Senator Nampijinpa Price**

The Albanese government must prioritise private enterprise if it truly wants to support Indigenous economic independence.

We've heard a lot from the Albanese government about the promised 3000 new remote jobs, which were supposed to be a consequence of overhauling and replacing the Community Development Program.

Aside from the Albanese government's failure to implement this new program within its first term as promised, there's no priority given to private sector jobs over government-created (and therefore dependent) ones. Further, the 3000 jobs are hard to pin down. When member for Lingiari Marion Scrymgour was given a chance to pin them down on the ABC recently, she pointed to about 120 jobs in the Tiwi Islands and said "we're seeing this" in Alpara.

The Albanese government just isn't hitting the mark. And again, its initiatives to encourage Indigenous economic engagement like the Indigenous Procurement Policy are centred on government dependence.

The Albanese government is failing to encourage private enterprise; particularly in remote communities, where some of our most marginalised live. Because thanks to the economic and regulatory disaster zone it has created, it's hard enough to set up a business in an urban area, let alone in a remote community.

Beyond mere isolation, many remote areas have to navigate complex bureaucracy to use or develop their land. You can't blame marginalised Indigenous Australians for not wanting to dive headfirst into



**We cannot
continue to keep
our marginalised in
socialist enclaves**

private enterprise; we've simply killed off any aspiration to engage. We cannot continue to have fly-in, fly-out tradespeople servicing remote communities because there's no local ability to meet the need. We cannot continue to keep our marginalised in socialist enclaves dependent on government for their survival.

The Albanese government must examine the structural barriers that make private enterprise so hard for marginalised Indigenous Australians in the bush. It must reform land rights legislation and sort out the bureaucracy of land councils, which often seem more invested in control than economic independence.

Because entrepreneurship and business in the private sector provides the best platform for economic independence. Imagine communities being able to provide goods, services and trades for themselves. Not only is the community strengthened and employment increased, but aspiration is birthed and purpose revitalised. Future generations dream for themselves having been inspired by the examples before them.

The Albanese government must free marginalised Indigenous Australians from being dependent on it, and supporting private enterprise is where that must begin. ●

A portrait of Drew Paten, a young man with short brown hair and a mustache, smiling. He is wearing a grey t-shirt. The background is a solid red color.

OPINION | DREW PATEN

Driving change, promoting culture

Indigenous entrepreneurs are not waiting for permission to make their mark; they're already doing it. Across Australia, young Indigenous business leaders are driving change, innovating within their industries and embedding culture into their ventures. Yet, despite their passion and potential, the path to economic independence often remains challenging. The question is not whether Indigenous entrepreneurship matters; it's how the broader community can actively support it.

When we talk about investing in young Indigenous entrepreneurs, we're talking about more than just business. It's about creating opportunities that last, fostering leadership that respects cultural integrity and building economic resilience for generations to come. For too long, discussions around Indigenous business have focused on overcoming obstacles rather than celebrating strengths. It's time to shift that narrative.

Take the example Talwali, an Indigenous-led coffee roastery that is creating jobs and embedding sustainable practices into its business model. Similarly, Ngarrimili is another key organisation doing incredible work to support Indigenous entrepreneurship, offering tailored programs that nurture the skills and capabilities of emerging business leaders. These ventures don't just contribute economically; they build cultural pride, provide mentorship opportunities and demonstrate that Indigenous-led innovation is a key part of Australia's economic future.

But supporting Indigenous entrepreneurship isn't just

good for communities; it's good for the entire country.

On a macro level, strong Indigenous businesses drive economic growth, create jobs and build resilience.

On a micro level, these businesses build stronger communities, inspire young leaders and demonstrate that business success doesn't have to come at the expense of cultural values.

For non-Indigenous readers, it's important to recognise that supporting Indigenous business is not about charity. It's about actively investing in the future of our nation. This same commitment should extend beyond Indigenous communities to include other historically marginalised groups. When we build economic pathways for under-represented entrepreneurs, whether they are from culturally diverse backgrounds, rural areas, or other disadvantaged communities, we're not just fostering individual success; we're strengthening the fabric of our economy and building a future that truly represents all Australians. It's about creating an inclusive economy where everyone benefits. That means investing in mentorship, providing financial literacy programs and creating genuine partnerships that respect cultural knowledge and business acumen.

We need to see young Indigenous entrepreneurs as leaders who are shaping the future of Australian business. Their success stories are not just inspirational, they are integral to building a more equitable and thriving economy. By supporting their journeys, we are investing in a more prosperous future for all.

Together, we can create a landscape where young Indigenous businesses don't just survive, they thrive. Let's move from passive support to active engagement, ensuring that these young leaders have the tools, networks and encouragement to continue making their mark on the world. ●

ABOUT THE WRITER

Drew Paten is a Gunai/Kurnai man, raised on Boonwurrung country. He is community programs manager at the Koorie Youth Council, co-owner of Melbourne's Talwali Coffee Roasters and the recipient of the 2025 Victorian Young Achiever of the Year Award

Best foot forward on the runway to design success

Australian Fashion Week is a stunning showcase for First Nations couturiers, **David Prestipino** and **Maria Marouchtchak** report

Trends are changing not just on the runway, as a new cohort of young entrepreneurs puts designs on their own businesses.

New CommBank research shows Millennials and Gen Z are driving Australian entrepreneurship, accounting for 62 per cent of new CommBank business transaction account openings over the past year. Millennials (born 1981 to 1996) made up 49 per cent, Gen Z (1997 to 2012) 13 per cent, and retail trade, personal and business services and construction are among the most popular sectors.

The release of the data coincided with Australian Fashion Week in Sydney, where CommBank sponsored First Nations shows including Liandra, Ngali and Joseph & James, alongside The Frontier runway.

Two of the standout First Nations designers, Colleen Tighe-Johnson (Buluuy Mirrii) and Melissa Greenwood (Miimi and Jiinda), were among more than 30 creatives unveiling collections that fused culture and couture.

Tighe-Johnson uses her label, Buluuy Mirrii ("Black Star" in Gomerioi), to revive Gomerioi Dreaming stories through commissioned artworks printed onto luxury fabrics and showcased as one-off garments. Her shows feature Gomerioi soundtracks and voiceovers, offering audiences a cultural education alongside fashion.

Her models come from the Buluuy Mirrii Youth Development program, giving young Aboriginal people national and international exposure. Tighe-Johnson, a 30-year customer of CommBank, says the bank's backing has been critical.

"Supporting AFW gives First Nations designers an opportunity to work with [CommBank] on supporting our businesses," she tells Indigenous Business Review. "Financially that support means a lot. Not only to myself and my brand but to all First Nations designers and fashion businesses."

Tighe-Johnson will soon take Buluuy Mirrii to Paris

Fashion Week. Milan is also on the cards.

Gumbaynggirr designer Melissa Greenwood co-founded Miimi and Jiinda ("mother and sister") with her mother, Lauren Jarrett, a Stolen Generation survivor. The duo began with original artworks that evolved into a sustainable high-end clothing label.

Greenwood's bold, wearable designs are complemented by Jarrett's intricate, handwoven pieces. Their brand made history with a sell-out collaboration with Adairs, and it has since partnered with SEED, Jurlique and others to bring Indigenous creativity into homes nationwide.

Greenwood, who has banked with CommBank since childhood, now works with the bank at a business level.

"They have an amazing business support team. It's been a real strength for us," she says. "Being at AFW has been one of the biggest highlights; doing what I love and sharing stories that are so dear to my heart. It's an amazing feeling, so much learning and connection."

In the family business, Greenwood's partner Abraham frames Miimi and Jiinda artworks using recycled timber and manages operations and logistics.





“
Being at
AFW ... is an
amazing
feeling, so
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learning and
connection



Clockwise from left: Savannah Kruger wears Miimi & Jiinda; models wear pieces by Ngali on the Australian Fashion Week runway; Caleb Law wears designer Joseph & James; designer Ngali's pieces on show; Lisa Fatnowna wears Liandra; and Kaleema Donovan wears Buluuy Mirrii
Photos: Australian Fashion Week

CommBank's support at Australian Fashion Week comes as spending in household goods, particularly online marketplaces, department stores, clothing and furniture, continues to rise, according to its Household Spending Insights Index.

Australian Fashion Council chief executive Kellie Hush welcomes the support.

"The business of fashion continues to be an exciting but challenging industry," Hush says. "CommBank understands how important it is to nurture small and medium businesses in the early stages of growth."

Fashion also stands out as a sector where

women dominate the workforce (77 per cent of employees), offering genuine opportunities for professional success.

CommBank executive general manager of small business Rebecca Warren says younger Australians remain undeterred despite economic challenges.

"Gen Z and Millennials account for 72 per cent of all new businesses in retail trade, showing they are willing to pursue their passion," she said.

"It is great to see the entrepreneurial spirit in Australia alive and well. We are proud to support small business owners, whether just starting out or scaling up." ●



Tara Croker
Yaala Sparkling
Backed by CommBank
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Harnessing fire and First Nations wisdom

Traditional practices are getting a more central role as severe weather hits more frequently, Zak Kirkup reports

When Darren Hammond, a proud Gomeroi man, joined Insurance Australia Group in 2022 as Indigenous engagement manager, it marked the beginning of a significant shift for one of Australia's largest insurers. As the nation's changing climate intensified bushfires, floods and cyclones, Hammond's role quickly evolved beyond the traditional corporate mandate.

Today, he's helping reshape how Australia's insurance industry engages with First Nations communities, integrating tens of thousands of years of Indigenous ecological knowledge into disaster preparedness and resilience.

"IAG has made huge strides in embedding reconciliation into its core business strategy, but our work isn't done," says Hammond. "The climate crisis has made it clear that traditional practices, especially around land management and disaster resilience, aren't just culturally significant—they're essential."

Growing up in Moree, NSW, Hammond was deeply influenced by his grandparents and he continues to look to leaders like Stan Grant and Barack Obama as a source of inspiration.


"Both have leadership qualities that are respected, humble and inclusive, driven by a strong sense of what's right," Hammond says. His own journey to reconciliation grew out of seeing first-hand the disparity in opportunities between Moree and Sydney.

"I believe reconciliation is something the rest of the country needs to come to terms with, to acknowledge the true history and heal, so we can move forward as a society that celebrates the beauty and strength of our culture," he says. Community resilience, he says, isn't solely about disaster response, but also about local economies and wellbeing.

IAG, home to brands such as NRMA Insurance, CGU and WFI Insurance, recently launched its fifth Reconciliation 



The Indigenous Business Review



Insurance Australia Group
Indigenous engagement manager
Darren Hammond on Gadigal Land,
dressed by M.J. Bale.
Photo: Lawrence Furzey

► Action Plan (RAP), embedding ambitious commitments within its operations. Central to this new RAP is a significant uplift in Indigenous procurement, committing \$10m over three years, representing a 68 per cent increase, and a sharper focus on career development and workplace safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

IAG group executive for people, performance and reputation Christine Stasi sees the integration of reconciliation into daily operations as key: "We've made significant progress in integrating our RAP with our business strategy, recognising the most impact we can have is through our direct business operations."

Underpinning this commitment is a recognition that procurement isn't just about economic opportunity; it's about empowering Indigenous communities in resilience-building efforts. Hammond says partnering with Indigenous organisations such as the Aboriginal Carbon Foundation, which began in 2022, demonstrates how IAG is creating tangible outcomes by combining Indigenous expertise with modern risk management strategies.

"We're investing heavily in Indigenous suppliers, not just to tick a box, but because it has real economic benefits for communities," he says. "When Indigenous businesses thrive, so do the communities they support."

At the heart of IAG's resilience strategy is embedding First Nations knowledge, particularly around traditional land-management practices such as cultural burning, into modern disaster response frameworks. Hammond cites the increased frequency and severity of extreme weather as a reason for deeper collaboration with Indigenous communities.

"First Nations communities possess deep ecological knowledge and an understanding of Country developed over 65,000 years," he says. "Practices like cultural burning have already proven to reduce the intensity of bushfires, regenerate ecosystems and strengthen community resilience."

IAG actively promotes this knowledge through initiatives such as sponsoring the documentary *The Knowledge Keeper*, aired on SBS On Demand, to educate broader audiences on Indigenous fire-management practices. The insurer has also partnered with the Australian Red Cross and researchers such as Bhiemie Williamson from the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research to embed First Nations leadership into disaster resilience policies.

Reflecting on his personal experiences, Hammond recalls moments of discrimination growing up in Moree and later during his retail career. "Discrimination was something many of us experienced at one point or another," he says. These experiences have profoundly shaped his approach to advocacy for cultural safety within corporate Australia.

"I'm really proud that IAG is taking meaningful steps to address discrimination, not just for mob, but for all culturally diverse people within our organisation," he says. "My own experiences, along with conversations and research from leading experts, have ignited a fire in me to advocate for culturally safe spaces."

His career path wasn't always clear. After graduating from high school in Moree, Hammond initially worked in



Darren Hammond, second from right, top; with his mother at his graduation, right; and far left at left with IAG colleagues during NAIDOC Week



“
I saw a path
where I
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career and
help others
start theirs

retail. He completed his first degree at age 35. His turning point came while working at Westpac as a teller.

“I realised I wanted more, and when offered a role helping the organisation hire more Indigenous people, I saw a path where I could grow my own career and help others start theirs,” Hammond says.

Now chair of Deadly Science, a not-for-profit aiming to create STEM equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners, Hammond stresses the importance of continuous learning and adaptation in Indigenous engagement.

“Embedding Indigenous engagement into business strategy is a challenge and an opportunity that motivates me every day,” he says.

At IAG, Hammond also learned the importance of personal wellbeing. Last year, while he was experiencing burnout, he credits IAG’s supportive environment and flexible working arrangements for helping him recover. “Being able to work from Moree really helped me manage my wellbeing,” he says.

Looking to the future, Hammond wants his legacy at IAG to include systemic change that benefits future generations, embedding Indigenous engagement into core business-planning and influencing industry-wide improvements.

“At IAG, we don’t just talk about reconciliation; we’re making it central to how we do business,” Hammond says. “That’s the change I’m proudest to be part of.” ●

Stream free on



The Knowledge Keepers

Sharing the past to prepare for the future



Boots on common ground



Two Pilbara-based organisations have far more than just a seat at the table in a pair of career-building joint ventures in mining services, writes **Zak Kirkup**

What's unfolding on Robe River Kuruma Country isn't just another joint venture but a recalibration of how economic power and Indigenous ownership should look in practice. Through the establishment of two significant joint ventures, one with Mineral Resources' wholly-owned subsidiary CSI Mining Services, the other with MinRes Air, the diversified miner's inhouse airline, Robe River Services and the RRK community are carving a path that places traditional owners at the centre of operations, governance and long-term strategy.

"These partnerships are about genuine co-ownership, shared decision-making, and long-term impact," says Robe River Kuruma Aboriginal Corporation and RRS chairperson Kelly Slattery.

Unlike legacy models that sidelined traditional owners or offered short-term gain, these JVs embed RRK as equal partners from day one. "RRK doesn't just have a seat at the table, they co-own the table," Slattery says.

The first of the two JVs, between RRS and CSI, focuses on building skills across a broad swath of mining services, from operating excavators and dump trucks to roles in safety and administration at the Onslow Iron project in the Pilbara.

The second, with MinRes Air, opens up an entirely new frontier: aviation. Here, RRK members can pursue pathways from ground handling to becoming certified aerodrome reporting officers.

"These programs aren't just about entry-level roles, they're designed to build careers," says MinRes chief

executive mining services Mike Grey.

He points to the combination of on-the-job experience, industry-specific training, and support systems that enable RRK members to progress into higher-skilled, long-term roles across the MinRes network.

It's already producing tangible results. From an inaugural contract for premium workforce coach hire through RRS, to early wins with businesses like Djeleanna, Ngarliya Contracting and Jaliyarnu Yinta, the strategy is delivering immediate benefits and building future capacity.

Importantly, the JVs operate on RRK Country itself, a choice that was deliberate and strategic.

"Doing business on RRK Country means doing it the right way, with respect, cultural alignment and local knowledge leading the way," Slattery says.

As a model, this partnership is grounded in more than profit.

"Real success," says Grey, "is defined by the sustainable economic empowerment of both RRS and the RRK community."

That means growing asset ownership, supporting Indigenous enterprise and building a workforce that can lead, not follow. These aren't short-term measures: they're long-term investments in sovereignty, economic independence and a future where RRK leads from the front. ●

Mines to vines: a story of diversity

Adaptability and sustainability are at the heart of Mitu Wines, writes **Dianne Bortoletto**

Guided by respect, driven by collaboration and grounded in community, Florence Drummond brings purpose and vision to every sphere she leads.

Having forged a career in the mining industry, where she's still employed as an executive director at the Development Partner Institute, Drummond has launched her latest venture, Mitu Wines, making her the first Indigenous woman to own a wine label.

Over the past decade, her reputation has grown as a global expert in multi-stakeholder engagement, strategic partnerships and sustainable development.

From high-powered boardrooms to outback mine sites, she has championed new narratives for inclusive growth and Indigenous leadership.

Moving to Margaret River two years ago to reset after corporate life burnout, Drummond has spent time with the Wadandi Elders, following cultural protocol before beginning her new business.

"Wine is a reflection of the abundance of Country, so it was important to me to connect with the Wadandi people to seek their permission and guidance to work on their Country, because the land connects us all," Drummond says.

Mitu is starting with small batch supplies, producing just 1000 bottles of each wine while crafting a sustainable business model that can adapt as it grows.

Partnering with well-regarded wine makers in the Margaret River wine region, and after extensive consultation with the wine community and Wadandi people, Drummond has already won a legion of supporters.

Florence Drummond spoke with Wadandi Elders before starting out on her new venture on their Country
Picture: Ovis



“
I’m new
to the
industry, so
I’m taking a
sustainable
approach

Drummond channels her ‘mines to vines’ journey into a compelling story of regeneration. Her entrepreneurial pivot reflects a deeper truth: leaders of great legacy are those who lead by example, with courage, humility and long-term vision.

Growing up by the sea on Thursday Island, Drummond’s Torres Strait Islander and Creole family are known as the saltwater people. Synchronicity at play, the Wadandi people in Western Australia’s southwest are also known as the saltwater people.

In a metaphoric move, Drummond, a saltwater woman, found her way to the ocean on the opposite side of the continent where she creates delicious drops, a product that bridges worlds and brings people together.

As one of only a handful of Indigenous wine businesses in Australia, Drummond sees Mitu Wines as a conversation starter and a celebration of unique perspectives.

“I’m always curious about niche markets and business, and I love wine, so when I moved here, I soon recognised this was a space ripe for disruption,” Drummond says.

“In my work in the mining industry, we activate local ecosystems, work with Traditional Owners and

stakeholders and elevate opportunities for Indigenous people to become leaders, and I applied those same principals to Mitu before Mitu even had a name.”

Mitu translates to ‘me and you’ in Torres Strait Islander Creole. The name speaks to something larger, a gentle yet determined push to continue to diversify the wine industry across its entire value chain. It’s an industry where Indigenous women have rarely been seen, yet Drummond’s presence feels both radical and entirely natural.

Her approach to winemaking mirrors the lessons learned from her childhood by the sea, taking only what’s needed, and respecting the land’s bounty, what we call in modern terms, sustainability.

“I’m new to the wine industry, so I’m taking a sustainable approach; I need to be strategic and economical in how I approach and test the market, taking an agile business format of collaborating with wine makers and local businesses where it feels right and makes sense.”

Just as her family would gather to share the day’s catch, each bottle of Mitu wine is meant to be shared mindfully, celebrating the moment and the company.

“It’s not about being overindulgent; it’s about connection and being grateful,” Drummond says.



Drummond says she is mindful of the many different facets and responsibilities of an Indigenous business in the alcohol sector. “The complex history of alcohol’s introduction to Australia through colonisation and its effects on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is well documented and continues to impact us, and I see this opportunity with Mitu Wines to proactively influence that narrative.”

The plan is for Mitu wine bottles to carry mindful drinking messages and to acknowledge the historical harms done to Indigenous populations. It’s a bold and intelligent approach that demonstrates her commitment to responsible business practices while honouring her cultural responsibilities.

Drummond’s business acumen, global influence and deep cultural grounding position her as a next-generation leader redefining success: one rooted in relationships, resilience and results. Her impact reaches far beyond the wine and mining industries: it extends into the very heart of what ethical, future-forward leadership should look like.

Mitu is more than making history as the first wine label owned by an Indigenous woman: it’s a symbol for bridging sectors and reshaping legacy industries.

I’ll drink to that. ●



A mother and her children who benefitted from the PAMS project, thanks to BHP's Telethon donations

Miner's major helping hand

A BHP donation has boosted regional child health services, David Prestipino reports

Indigenous healthcare across Pilbara communities is the focus of a \$5.5m donation from resources giant BHP to Telethon.

The 2025 beneficiaries of the miner's biggest-ever donation were announced at an annual Telethon beneficiaries breakfast recently.

The East Pilbara-based Upstream Health Project is one of the programs to be run via the donation, which will benefit communities where BHP operates.

Run by Puntukurnu Aboriginal Media Service, the project ensures there is a permanent, culturally appropriate maternal and child health service in the region.

The project is already having a life-changing impact.

Single mother of five and Martu woman Jennifer Landi says PAMS is instrumental to helping her navigate multiple aspects of her life.

Services such as maternal health help, specialist referrals, telehealth consultations, child support and transportation to and from medical appointments, locally and to Perth, have been invaluable.

"Raising a child on your own is already difficult, but caring for multiple children is incredibly overwhelming," Landi says.

"I've been doing this on my own, and without PAMS clinical services and the Upstream Program, I don't know where we would be or if we would have made it this far."

PAMS has empowered Landi and many other women in her community through education on self-care and child health.

"Thanks to what we've learned, we can now raise awareness among other women on how to improve their health and that of their children," she says.

BHP's Telethon donation will also help fund the establishment of a Rare Care Centre Pilbara Hub, dedicated to earlier detection and intervention of rare diseases, and provide additional support for Julyardi Aboriginal Corporation in Hedland to expand its wraparound health services for vulnerable families.

BHP WA community manager Rachel Donkin says the company's social investment program has been designed with an eye to the future.

"We are always looking at how we can make these communities not only better places to live and work, but sustainable, thriving and empowered centres for future generations," she says.

"Access to healthcare is a key part of that commitment and we are thrilled to partner with these incredible organisations to help improve long-term health outcomes." ●

■ *Note: Jennifer Landi's name has been changed to protect her identity.*

Loaded up and trucking

It's been a relationship a decade in the making for the Kurtarra Cape Joint Venture and Fortescue, one that has grown in significance.

KCU has recently undertaken a capital program enabling Kurtarra to embed critical equipment within the partnership. This was made possible by the strong relationship with Cape and Fortescue's Buriya Capital Funding Program.

Building on their existing partnership, Kurtarra's long-term contract with Fortescue was extended to enable the purchase of new equipment, including excavators, loaders and water trucks.

For Kurtarra, led by Palyku man Garry Jaffrey, the contract has provided stability to invest in people, to strengthen systems and to help other Aboriginal businesses scale.

Formed to deliver civil and mining services in remote Western Australia, Kurtarra has evolved from its early roots into a business that now operates across the Pilbara and the Kimberley. It has plans for national growth.

For Jaffrey and the Kurtarra team, the work is personal. The business was established with a vision of bringing Indigenous and non-Indigenous people

A contract with Fortescue is helping Kurtarra to expand operations, writes Zak Kirkup

together, working side by side to grow something meaningful and lasting.

That philosophy continues to guide the company's approach to workforce development, its local engagement and how it collaborates with clients on the ground.

KCU director Jaffrey says: "When we first secured the contract, it was a big step, but what's followed has been transformational.

"It gave us the confidence to grow the business in a way that stayed true to our values, enabling us to invest in our people, build internal capability and create opportunities that make a real difference.

"The contract has matured into a partnership that's grounded in trust and shared purpose.

"We're now looking ahead to expanding into new regions and sectors, while continuing to support the communities we work in. For us, it's always been about

more than machines. It's about legacy, leadership and proving what's possible when Indigenous businesses are empowered to lead."

The contract with Fortescue has supported that journey, providing not only a solid pipeline of work, but also a relationship grounded in mutual respect and long-term thinking.

Fortescue senior manager of Aboriginal business development Martin Drage says: "It's been a privilege to work with Garry and the Kurtarra team over the years, and it's been truly inspiring to watch them go from strength to strength.

"Great partnerships are much more than just a business deal. They're built on respect, a shared vision and a genuine commitment to making a lasting impact.

"Through Fortescue's Billion Opportunities program, we're really proud to support First Nations businesses, like Kurtarra, to thrive and create meaningful legacies."

Today, Kurtarra is not only delivering on-site outcomes for one of Australia's major miners; it's creating a blueprint for how Indigenous enterprise can thrive when given the platform and the partnership to succeed. The results are measurable, the impact is local and the story is far from over. ●



Kurtarra started with a vision of bringing Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together

WORKING ON **COUNTRY**

together at Onslow Iron

ABOUT US

Jaliyarnu Yinta is a 100% Indigenous-owned landscaping business dedicated to caring for and working on their country. With deep-rooted connections to the land, Jaliyarnu Yinta combines traditional knowledge with modern practices to deliver exceptional and critical landscaping services that ensure environmental and cultural considerations are respected.



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Focus on the future

A Pilbara joint venture is powering a local company's growth plan, Zak Kirkup reports

When Ngarliya Contracting signed a five-year contract with Mineral Resources (MinRes) earlier this year, it marked more than just the start of a new commercial partnership — it signalled a shift in how Traditional Owners are empowered to deliver critical services on their own land.

Ngarliya is a joint venture between Paull & Warner Resources (PWR) and Jajiwarda Contracting, owned by Kelly Slattery, a Robe River Kuruma Traditional Owner of the land on which Ken's Bore mine site is located, and her partner Arran Henry. It is the first majority Indigenous-owned business to supply fire suppression services to MinRes, beginning at the Ken's Bore site in the Pilbara. Ken's Bore is at the heart of MinRes's transformational Onslow Iron project in the West Pilbara region of Western Australia.

"This contract is transformational for the communities we belong to," says Slattery.

"For me as a Traditional Owner, to be able to provide opportunities for members of the community to work on country is a huge advantage, and something to be very proud of."

Ngarliya's scope goes beyond fire suppression. The business also provides pest control services and is already looking to expand across other MinRes sites. The intention from the outset was to create a structure that's sustainable and capable of diversification.

"Offering diversification of roles, providing a service that is a requirement for businesses but also growth to provide opportunities in other areas, creates business sustainability," Slattery says.

That approach is already being seen in the training and recruitment that is under way. Two Indigenous employees are working back-to-back at Ken's Bore and there is a growing pool of skilled candidates in the wings. Before heading to the site, new recruits train at PWR's new Perth-based facility, gaining a Certificate II in Fire Suppression as well as hands-on experience with senior PWR staff.



Ngarliya Fire Technician
Deakin Winwood

"It's early days; we're just on one site at the moment, but our plans are for rapid growth," Henry says.

"Ngarliya has the capability to add a complete suite of services to deliver training and employment opportunities to local and Indigenous people, and to deliver services and products to clients to meet their site safety, emergency and rescue needs."

As the scope of work expands, so too will the team. New roles are planned across mobilisation, planning, and administration. Several Indigenous candidates are already being considered for a new planner position based in Perth, and the longer-term ambition includes

manufacturing fire appliances such as tankers and trucks.

"This is just the beginning," Henry says. "We hope to become a preferred supplier over the next five years and beyond, continuing to provide opportunities for local Indigenous people in the area."

For Slattery and Henry, the vision has always been clear: building a business where Traditional Owners can work on Country in roles that are essential, skilled and future-focused. Ngarliya is proving what's possible when that opportunity is not only identified but also delivered. ●

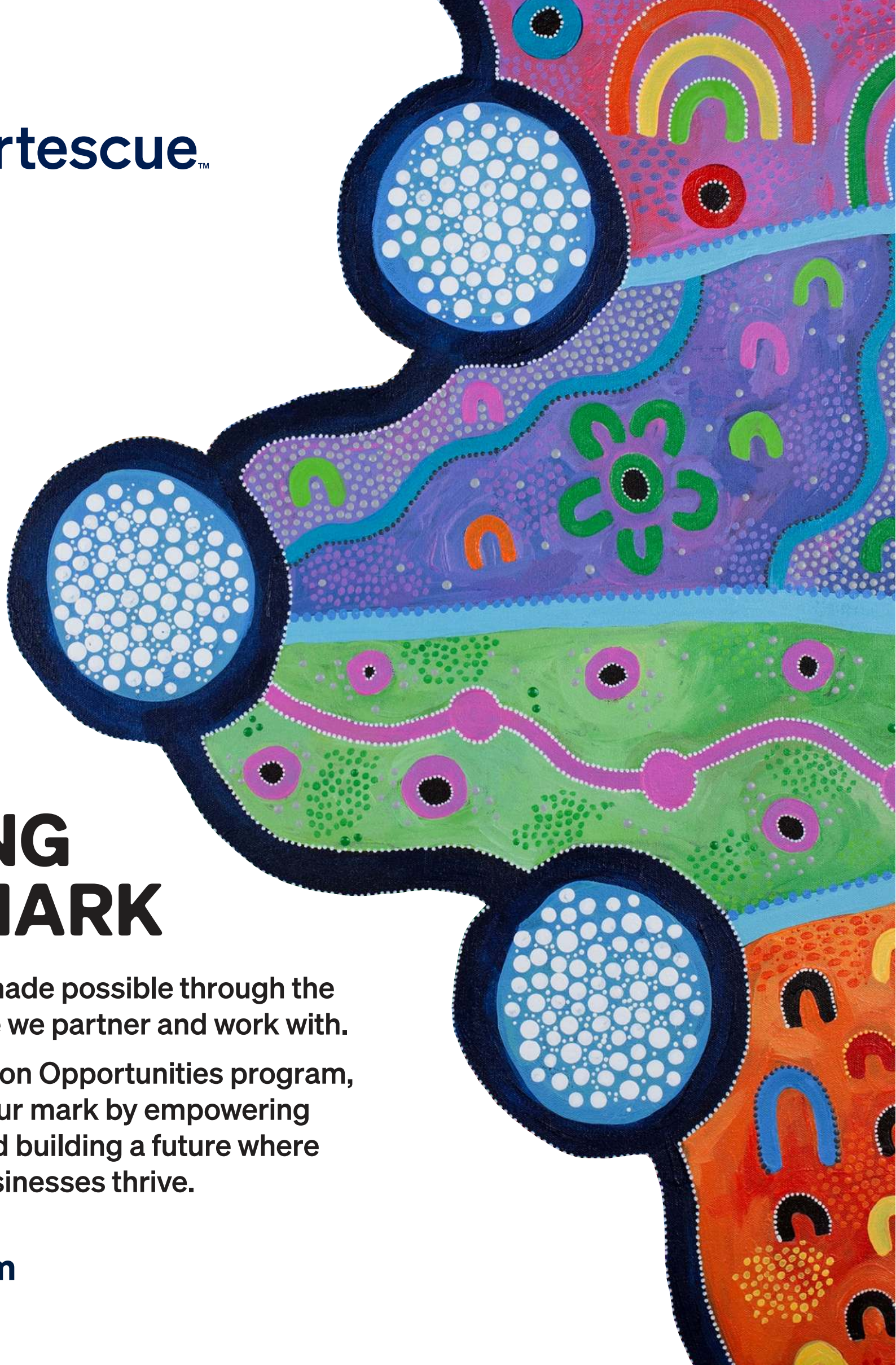


MAKING OUR MARK

Our success is made possible through the success of those we partner and work with.

Through our Billion Opportunities program, we are making our mark by empowering communities and building a future where First Nations businesses thrive.

fortescue.com





Best seat in the house

A keen appetite for learning set entrepreneur Brad Gimbert on an upward trajectory, Dianne Bortoletto reports

Born a heroin baby and given away at birth, Brad Gimbert epitomises the saying: if you want something, you have to go out and get it.

"No one is coming to save us," says Gimbert, founder of Indigenous Wealth, a firm helping First Nations people become property investors.

From the Wailwan people and raised in Blacktown in western Sydney by his adopted Barkindji father – part of the Stolen Generations – and a white mother, Gimbert always had an eye for success. As a child, he'd listen in on adult conversations about money; he'd offer drinks for \$1, or lend his sister \$10 and demand \$12 back. He was always hustling, always learning.

Success, to him, meant more than just security – it meant wealth, something his family never had.

"I used to say to my parents, 'what colour Ferrari do you want me to buy you when I'm rich?'," he says.

But the odds were stacked against him from the beginning. His biological mother was a heroin addict; his father, in prison. Gimbert was adopted by a family in western Sydney and, as the youngest of three by a decade, he grew up grateful for the second chance they gave him.

Life changed at 11 when his father was declared bankrupt. They lost everything, and Gimbert and his mother lived in a refuge in Rooty Hill for nine months before bouncing between public housing in the

western suburbs of Doonside, Lalor Park and Glenmore Park.

He was smart and he liked school enough to finish year 12, but he opted out of an ATAR.

"What was the point? I couldn't afford uni, and I knew I could go later as a mature-age student," he says.

At 14 years and nine months, he got his first job at McDonald's to help with rent and groceries. But like many teens around him, he also started selling drugs.

"I still felt I had a moral compass. I wasn't stealing or jumping people," he says.

Boxing became his outlet. Gimbert's first full-time job was in a shopping centre stall selling memberships, which forced him out of his shell. Then at 18, he was charged with cannabis possession. He was told it would be a caution, but it became a criminal record that cost him a traineeship in project management.

"I kept thinking, 'what do rich people do to get rich?'. That question led him to a company that trained people to become property investors. Gimbert paid to learn, and when a call centre role opened up, he jumped at it.

"I'd annoy everyone asking questions. I even offered to buy people lunch just so I could learn," he says.

He became the company's youngest consultant, earned his mortgage broker certificate, and was thriving. Things took a horrible turn when he caught a man he knew wearing only underwear trying to break

into his brother's house though his niece's bedroom.

"I ended up in this guy's house and beat him up pretty badly, he was in a coma, and I got charged with home invasion and grievous bodily harm."

He spent a year in prison. Every day, he wrote down his goals and when he wanted to achieve them.

"No one's going to do this for you," Gimbert reminded himself.

Three days after release, he was back working with former colleagues, gaining more experience in property investment. In 2020, he launched Indigenous Wealth, which now employs nine staff and engages around 15 contractors. He's proud of the impact he's had on his community.

"When I started, there were fewer than 100 Indigenous property investors in Australia. Through Indigenous Wealth, we've doubled that figure," he says. "What I'm trying to do is over-represent us in the top percentiles, instead of being over-represented in the worst ones."

He believes a turning point has arrived.

"We're dawning a new time, at the apex from surviving into thriving. What's possible now is worlds beyond what has been possible in the past," he says.

And the Ferrari?

"Well, I'm just about able to buy it now, but looking at the finances, it doesn't make sense." •

Central hub for finding a network

Up and coming concerns have a new nexus, writes **Brendan Foster**

Ngadjuri elder Parry Agius is so passionate about fostering economic growth for First Nations businesses that he decided to set up an Indigenous business chamber.

The First Nations entrepreneur, who has been a strong advocate for socio-economic benefits for Aboriginal people for three decades, recently established the Aboriginal Business Industry Chamber South Australia with consultant Dana Shen and construction manager Ian Sandell.

When I asked Agius if one of his goals for starting the chamber was to empower First Nations businesses, he didn't hold back.

"Bloody oath," he proudly bellowed to the National Indigenous Times.

"If people are coming to the door and they want to be there, then you know that you've got people with beliefs and values. And you want to translate that into opportunities for Aboriginal businesses."

As an independent and autonomous organisation, the Aboriginal Business Industry Chamber South Australia is hoping to attract thousands of members through various membership streams aimed at helping Aboriginal entrepreneurs access government procurement, industry networks and business development programs.

Agius says fostering strong partnerships between Aboriginal businesses and government and industry will empower First Nations communities and strengthen the Aboriginal business sector in South Australia.





"The aim for the chamber is to help businesses understand they're in a space that can be as vast — or as focused — as they want it to be," he says.

"And if you've got ambition, well, the chamber can bring the networks to you, and you just then use your communication skills to push yourself into that space and reinvent yourself in that space.

"So when you look at those four streams, what does that say in the sense of what it does for an Aboriginal business and if they're part of an organisation, then the Aboriginal businesses have contacts within itself, within the chamber to start doing engagements, so you don't have to actually go out and run around and chase everybody and anybody."

Agius, who consults to corporate and government clients through his Indigenous services company Linking Futures, says while the First Nations economy in South Australia has grown over the past 10 years, a lot more growth needs to happen.

He says one of the goals of the chamber is to support, promote and create pathways for Indigenous businesses that will create economic opportunities that drive sustainable growth for Aboriginal companies.

"If you want to just have an art business, and your art is in localised tourism, then that's great," he says. "But if you're in the art business and you want a much bigger picture, then how do you build yourselves now?"

"There are art galleries out there that are international, so how do you get yourself into the international scene?"

"So, there's the spider web for a business, it can be as big as it wants, but it's based on what current experience and expertise you've got, and what's your attitude about growing your business is, so that it builds until you reach the point where you've reached your peak, and you're so successful that people are coming to you."

Agius, who was last year's SA NAIDOC Male Elder of the Year, says the Federal government's recent tweaks to the Indigenous Procurement Policy are heading in the right direction, but more could be done.

In February, the government announced the IPP would be strengthened to require that Indigenous businesses be 51 per cent or more First Nations-owned and controlled to access the IPP. It also increased its target from 2.5 to 3 per cent of contracts from July 1 2025, increasing to 4 per cent by 2030.

"We don't know what the IPP story may look like in five or 10 years, because we don't know what the government's going to be like," Agius says.

"In that sense, we must build on what we've got right now and promote it to a point where Aboriginal businesses are growing as a result of the IPP. So, part of the chamber's role is to encourage Aboriginal businesses to look internally, as well as to look externally, and match their capabilities and their capacity and their innovation with what's out there, because that's where the money is." •

Clearing hurdles, making a mark

Mentoring engineers has a ripple effect, writes **Brendan Foster**

When First Nations entrepreneur Grant Maher finally launched his engineering consultancy business, he faced a hurdle he never saw coming.

The exact day he and his business partner Dennis Jose started trading as Jabin in March 2020, Brisbane went into lockdown because of Covid-19.

"So, our first official day for Jabin just happened to be my birthday, but it also happened to be the first day of lockdowns," Maher tells the National Indigenous Times.

"We were sitting down pretty nervously, racking through what's going to happen.

"But we were pretty lucky that we already had some work, but we kind of projected out that we probably only have about nine months' worth of income if we didn't find anything more."

Since navigating the treacherous waters of the pandemic, the Brisbane-based business has gone on to work on some major projects, including designing and testing the facade for the new Powerhouse Museum in Sydney's Parramatta and managing the delivery of numerous defence projects across Queensland.

The Aboriginal-owned and operated company also designed cyclone-proof housing for remote and regional communities, delivered as a flatpack that can be erected by locals within 16 hours.

Maher, a proud descendant of the Gumbaynggirr and Biripi people from northern NSW, says that, in some cases, the housing in remote communities is poorly designed.

"You have people who may not understand or just don't have that knowledge about Aboriginal communities, and designing something just not fit for purpose," he says.

"We always think about Indigenous people helping communities and our families through health and the law."



Grant Maher, right, and Dennis Jose had to see off the Covid-19 pandemic before winning some major contracts in NSW and Queensland

The 43-year-old is passionate about mentoring young First Nations engineers as he was the first Indigenous student to graduate from the University of Sydney with a double degree in engineering and commerce in 1998.

In 2016, he worked with Engineers Australia to create and develop the Indigenous Engineers Chapter with a focus on increasing numbers.

"A lot of Indigenous kids get into law or health," he says.

"Which is great, because you need doctors and good lawyers, but we never think about what engineers can do to benefit our communities from an engineering perspective.

"And that's a really big thing I want us to do."

Maier is also the chief executive of Deadly Coders, a registered charity on a mission to empower Indigenous youth to access effective education and career pathways through passion, creativity and technology.

The father of three is also a director at the Indigenous-owned company Fire and Wattle, which helps businesses

in developing, refining, or implementing their Reconciliation Action Plan. He says giving back to the community is at the forefront of everything he does.

"I was given an opportunity that would never have come to me if there wasn't anything out there like that," he says.

"I would have maybe gone down and become a pretty average lawyer, because that's not my thing.

"I want us to be involved in the decisions we make about infrastructure, about housing and the economy."

And when it comes to taking the plunge into business Maher has one bit of advice: just do it.

"Make sure you understand the industry you're going into," he says.

Understanding your market, understanding what you do and how you can differentiate yourself from the market.

"If you understand the market, you understand your product, you're in a pretty good stead," he says. ●



I want us to be involved in the decisions we make about housing and the economy

How our boots
come together is
what really sets
them apart.

*R.M.
Williams*

HANDCRAFTED IN AUSTRALIA SINCE 1932